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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0240
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 3658
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KYIV PRIORITY 0037
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1941
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 1708
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0933
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 6036
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI PRIORITY 0094
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 1050
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2164
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 7379
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 5473
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR BADER/WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2019

TAGS: [ETTC](#) [KOMC](#) [MARR](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#) [KN](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: THAI AUTHORITIES SEIZE PLANE WITH NORTH
KOREAN WEAPONS IN FIRST UNSCR 1874 INTERDICTION

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, REASON 1.4 (B, D)

This is an action request, see para 3.

¶1. (C) Summary: Thai Immigration and Customs Police seized a cargo plane carrying 35 tons of weapons from North Korea at a Bangkok airport late on December 11. Thai officials leaked information about the action to the Thai media late December 12, crediting the U.S. for providing information leading to the seizure. Thai PM Abhisit used his Sunday morning press availability December 13 to state that Thailand had carried out the interdiction effort under UNSCR 1874. Government spokesman Panitan Wattanayagorn told the media separately that the weapons included missiles, explosives, and tubes. The Georgian-registered IL-76 had originated in Ukraine, picked up its cargo in Pyongyang, and had landed at Bangkok's Don Muang airport for a re-fueling stop, with Sri Lanka and the U.A.E. listed as onward stops on the filed flight plan. The Royal Thai Police (RTP) Crime Suppression Bureau immediately detained/interrogated the five crew members, who carried passports from Kazakhstan (four crew) and Belarus (one); A Thai court denied the request for bail. The crew, scheduled to appear in criminal court on December 14, told investigators they believed they were carrying oil rig equipment, according to press reports. The Thai military have moved the cargo to a military base about 100 miles away from Bangkok and plan a more thorough inspection December 15.
End Summary.

¶2. (S) Comment: This seizure is a tremendous success on the counter-proliferation front. The Royal Thai Government's willingness to interdict the North Korean weapons shipment on short notice underscores again Thailand's track record as one of the USG's most reliable and important partners on the whole range of sensitive operational issues. It is our understanding that this is the first ever air-related interdiction of a North Korean shipment, as well as the first

major action taken under UNSCR 1874. In the hours leading up to the plane landing in Thailand, Ambassador engaged the offices of the PM and Deputy PM, both of whom were traveling outside Bangkok December 11, securing the necessary assent for the effort from NSC Secretary General Thawin. Thawin, in conversations with the Ambassador, quickly agreed to the inspection, on three conditions: that it be done quickly with no public coverage; that the Thai take the lead; and that it be done according to Thai law.

¶3. (S) Comment/Action Request: The Thai usually prefer to avoid being precedent setters, but they have now done so under UNSCR 1874. We recommend consideration of a Presidential phone-call to PM Abhisit thanking him for the Thai rapid action/cooperation. Washington should also consider how best to characterize publicly the ultimate end user for the seized weapons, a matter of intense speculation/interest among the media and diplomatic community here. Publicly, we recommend crediting the Thai for their action, rather than portraying this as a joint Thai-U.S. operation. End Comment/Action request.

PLANE, NORTH KOREAN WEAPONS SEIZED AT A BANGKOK AIRPORT

¶4. (U) Thailand's Immigration and Customs Police seized a cargo plane carrying over 35 tons of military weapons on December 11 when the plane landed at Bangkok's Don Muang Airport to refuel prior to a planned onward leg to Sri Lanka. The IL-76, which was registered as a commercial aircraft in Georgia, initially flew from Ukraine to North Korea, where it loaded the weapons, according to press reports, citing Thai officials familiar with the filed flight manifest. The

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plane's final destination was unknown; the pilot claimed the plane was meant to return to Ukraine, according to one media report, while other reports speculated the final destination was to Pakistan, or a country in the Middle East. Weapons seized included rocket-propelled grenades, components of surface-to-air missiles, and ammunition, Government Spokesman Panitan told the media December 13.

¶5. (SBU) Police detained the plane's five crew members, four Kazaks and one Belarusian. During interrogation by the RTP's Crime Suppression Bureau on December 13, the crew claimed no knowledge of weapons aboard, and said they thought they were transporting equipment for oil rigs. The pilot also claimed this was the third or fourth time he had carried a shipment like this, according to local news reports. The crew members were scheduled to appear before the Criminal Court on Monday, December 14; the initial application for bail filed by the Kazakhstan Embassy was denied, according to press reports. The Thai military have moved the cargo to Takhli airforce base in Nakorn Sawan province, about 100 miles north of Bangkok, and plan a more thorough inspection December 15, according to press reports.

JOHN